More local TV, newspapers on same page
By KARISSA S. WANG

Synergy among a media company's assets is becoming a common phenomenon all over the country. At the same time, however, in markets where newspapers and television stations have separate owners, cooperation between traditional rivals has also been on the rise.

NBC-owned WTVJ-TV, Miami, has had a formal partnership with the major newspaper in town, the Miami Herald, for seven years. WTVJ has a camera in the newspaper's newsroom, and the companies jointly pay a producer who works for both operations. The Herald has a column called "Action Line" that is translating into a TV segment for WTVJ. Most recently, when Herald reporter Martin Merzer went to Israel, WTVJ gave him a mini DVC Pro camera to shoot footage for the station. Mr. Merzer was able to feed several pieces back to WTVJ, which gave viewers a first-hand look at daily life in Israel. During the broadcast of Mr. Merzer's segments, WTVJ ran the Herald logo along with its own logo onscreen.

Boston-based New England Cable News has had a partnership with the Boston Globe newsroom for nine years. The Globe, owned by The New York Times, is the largest daily newspaper in New England, and NECN, owned partly by AT&T Broadband and Hearst Corp., is the largest regional news channel in the country, with 2.8 million subscribers. In the Globe newsroom, there are two robotic cameras controlled from NECN's studios in Newton, Mass. NECN uses the cameras to shoot Globe reporters, editors, columnists, photographers as they talk about issues for NECN newscasts.

For example, each day during the news channel's noon newscast, in a segment called "Globe at Home," a Globe reporter or expert in a field such as botany or music is featured for eight to 10 minutes.

"[Globe staffers] are a great resource for us on any number of stories," said NECN Assistant News Director Thomas Melville. "They've been a wonderful resource on the church abuse story. They have one of the best sports departments in the country, and their columnists are on the air a lot."

Hearst-Argyle's NBC affiliate WESH-TV, Orlando, Fla., and the Tribune-owned Orlando Sentinel newspaper announced in April an agreement to co-present and cross-promote weather coverage. The partnership includes a daily weather page in the Sentinel and daily weather coverage on OrlandoSentinel.com and WESH-TV's Newschannel2000.com. There is also "Ask Dave," a daily interactive feature on the sites where readers and online users can ask WESH Chief Meteorologist Dave Marsh to answer their questions. "Ask Dave" also appears in the newspaper.
WESH General Manager Bill Bauman said this was the third deal the station has done with the Sentinel. They began a partnership three years ago doing "The High School Sports Show," which airs at 12:30 p.m. Saturdays. The newspaper has a television unit that shoots footage. WESH Sports Director Bill Shafer is the show's anchorman. The newspaper sells the inventory, and the station gets a fee.

"The economics are favorable for both of us," Mr. Bauman said. "High school sports is a tough market. Even though we're only the 20th market [nationally], it's a very broad market geographically. So the Sentinel was able to leverage their sports section of the newspaper and the TV show in order to attract sponsors."

WESH struck a second deal with the Sentinel two years ago. Based on a print campaign the paper had been running for several years, the companies began jointly producing 30-second vignettes called "Top 100 Companies," which feature the 100 most family-friendly companies in the area. The segments run for four to six weeks beginning each June.

The two companies have also been conducting co-branded political polls for the past year and for the first time in October will co-sponsor a gubernatorial debate. They will also co-sponsor congressional debates this year.

While WESH and the Sentinel typically compete for advertisers, they "compete in different ways than we used to," Mr. Bauman said.

For example, he said, the companies' weather deal involves co-producing a hurricane-tracking chart, an essential manual for most Florida residents. The booklets, which come with the June 2, edition of the Sentinel, can be purchased separately for 50 cents each. This year WESH and the Sentinel will produce a half-million hurricane tracking charts.

"That's where we both share the inventory," Mr. Bauman said. "We both have the opportunity to sell broadcast and print. ... It makes a lot of sense for both parties."

WESH will air a one-hour special featuring the charts on June 1, which marks the first day of hurricane season.

Another example of successful synergy is the partnership between Belo-owned CBS affiliate KENS-TV and the Hearst-owned San Antonio Express News. In 1999, the two parties partnered in the Web site MySanAntonio.com. Both entities donate time and space to promote the Web site. They both contribute content as well, with the station providing news clips for video streaming. KENS General Manager Robert McGann said by the end of the year they may also collaborate on joint news pieces. Express News entertainment reporter Edmund Tijerina will appear on KENS to talk about events happening around town and to promote content that will appear in the weekend editions of the San Antonio Express. Starting this month, KENS Chief Meteorologist Albert Flores will have a weekday column on the newspaper's weather page.

Mr. McGann said when they started the joint Web site, there were 4 million page views a month. Now they consistently get about 10 million. The site also gets
400,000 unique visitors per month, making it the most popular Web site in San Antonio, eight times larger than the nearest competitor, Mr. McGann said. The Web site has a sales force, and KENS and the Express News sales staff also help sell the site. The entities share ad revenue equally.

"We're now concentrating on the revenues for it," Mr. McGann said. "I think it's wise to try to partner with a newspaper, at least from a TV standpoint, because of the advantages in marketing, exposure of your meteorologist or reporters and just because of the resources a newspaper has."

While the San Francisco market is in transition as viewers get used to KRON-TV's new status as an independent station and NBC's taking over KNTV, Cox-owned Fox affiliate KTVU-TV has been quietly working on increasing its market share. Last May the station began a partnership with the San Francisco Chronicle.

Every other Sunday, KTVU and the Chronicle run co-produced broadcast and print versions of the same story. During ratings books in February, May, November and July, co-produced pieces run every Sunday. Roland De Wolk, producer for KTVU special reports, goes to the Chronicle's Sunday planning meeting, where the two parties discuss upcoming pieces they will work on together. A recently co-produced piece on the weakening structure of the historic Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco garnered the attention of the state legislature, which ultimately granted money to fix the signature building.

This kind of synergy between print and TV rivals appears to be the future of electronic media. "It's definitely the way things are going," Mr. De Wolk said."

He believes there will always be a rivalry between print and television, but convergence is inevitable. "The Chronicle cannot do television, and KTVU cannot do newspapers -- we need each other," he said. "We're not doing it just for next Sunday or the next sweeps, we're doing it for the next generation. When everything changes, we'll be in position."

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